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CHANGES IN THEOLOGY AMONG AMERICAN METHODISTS

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Since its foundation epoch American Methodism has not undertaken any formal creed revision, or even seriously discussed any proposition for revision. It is impossible, therefore, to speak of openly consummated and universally acknowledged changes in the theology of American Methodists. The best that can be done with our theme is to take note of such facts as evince distinct tendencies to changed doctrinal conceptions—tendencies sufficiently steadfast and widespread to warrant the conclusion, either that they are already in the ascendant, or that they are likely ere long to hold a dominant place. In a task of this kind there is doubtless a considerable chance for differing judgments, an accurate rating of tendencies within a complex and widely extended constituency being no easy matter. Two mistakes in particular will need to be carefully guarded against. On the one hand, it will not do to estimate the theological status of a communion by a mere show of hands, since a majority may, in the view of a clear-sighted observer, be certainly foredoomed to dwindle very decidedly, when once the influences are brought to bear upon it which have already changed the point of view of the opposing minority. On the other hand, it will not answer to take a vociferous advocacy of new opinions as an unequivocal sign of a deep-seated and victorious tendency to change, since the zealous and hustling advocate may be for the most part an eccentricity, representing no substantial dogmatic impulse or need of any large company. Avoiding these opposite errors, the judicial investigator will seek to ascertain the real trend of vital and scholarly conviction. When he sees that for an appreciable period changes in doctrinal conception within the ranks of men at once studious and practical in their mental habits are almost uniformly in a given direction, and appear to proceed

with cumulative force, he will feel authorized to infer that he has discovered reliable tokens of a doctrinal transition.

It is our judgment that a fair application of the standard just set forth to the investigation of American Methodism will reveal that many changes have occurred in relation to a few of the themes of theology, and that tentative efforts are being made for more or less revision of the traditional views in connection with some other themes. In sustaining this judgment against the challenge which is likely to be forthcoming, it will be necessary to cite as much of the historical evidence as our limits will admit. The themes to which we shall have occasion to refer are the conception of the Bible, original sin, the person and work of Christ, the conception of personal salvation, and eschatology.

I. *The conception of the Bible.*—For several decades Methodists, in common with other American Christians, have been aware of a conflict between two contrasted theories of the Bible. On the one hand is the high technical theory, which at the acme insists upon complete verbal inspiration of every part of Scripture, and in any case maintains the inerrancy or detailed infallibility of the Bible as originally written. On the other hand is the broader theory, which indeed cordially grants that the Bible contains the materials of a complete ethical and religious system, but renounces the notion of a detailed infallibility or inerrancy of every part, and places the stress upon the trend and outcome of the biblical teaching.

The evidence indicates that American Methodism began substantially upon the basis of the high technical theory, so far as that theory affirms inerrancy. There was a lack of explicit assertion on the subject. In almost any standard Methodist treatise one looks in vain for a proper parallel to the strong and unqualified declarations of the great dogmatists of the seventeenth century. The general assumption, however, up to the more recent decades, seems to have been that there was no need to admit any mistakes of any sort in the original Scriptures, and no propriety in so doing. This appears to have been the standpoint represented by Richard Watson in his *Theological Institutes*, which for a considerable period ranked as the unrivaled textbook of American Methodism. Later writers, whose works in systematic theology have been utilized in the education of

the preachers, have dealt with the Bible, for the most part, in the same manner. Miner Raymond contended rather for the truth of the Bible in general than treated specifically of the question of errancy. Here and there, however, one finds tokens that his mind was dominated by the high technical theory. He remarks, for instance:

Because, beyond reasonable question, miracles have been actually wrought for the specific purpose of attesting the Sacred Word, we deem it thereby demonstrated that what the Bible says God says.¹

Of course, this statement might mean less than that God is the author of every sentence in the Bible. But the way in which Raymond comments on the early narratives in Genesis conveys the impression that he designed his statement to be taken in its full breadth. W. B. Pope, an English Wesleyan, whose name is properly mentioned here on account of the use of his dogmatic work for a period in the conference course of study, gave some indications of a disposition to modify the stringent theory. He admitted differing degrees of inspiration, suggested that the limitations of witnesses may have come to manifestation in their reports, and frankly acknowledged that a considerable body of discrepancies appears on the face of the biblical narratives. Nevertheless, in the final issue he resorted to the assumption of inerrancy as characteristic of the original biblical documents. Having noted that many cases of discrepancy may plausibly be referred to the faulty work of transcribers, he added:

Each of these must be carefully sifted, and the result will generally be satisfactory. When it is not so, we are bound to believe that errors have crept in through the operation of causes that we cannot now trace.²

John Miley was noncommittal in this relation, and the most that can be said on the basis of his printed writings is that he took very little account of the possibility of errors in the Scriptures. In a much-honored textbook of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, a stalwart doctrine of inerrancy found expression from the pen of T. O. Summers. One of his sentences runs as follows:

Even in all subordinate and collateral matters of history, chronology, ethnography, topography, sociology, and the like, the Scriptures are perfectly con-

¹ *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, p. 100.

² *Compendium of Theology*, Vol. I, p. 188.

sistent with themselves, with all other trustworthy records, and with all the phenomena and facts which are now patent to our observation.³

If we pass from theological treatises to articles in periodical literature, we find that the high technical theory, or the doctrine of complete inerrancy, has not lacked for advocates. Gilbert Haven, in a series of articles contributed to the *Methodist Review* for the years 1867 and 1868, contended with characteristic ardor for the conclusion that every word of the Bible was given forth under the inbreathing or impulse of the Holy Ghost. Professor Hemenway, in an article which appeared in 1877, showed a pronounced unwillingness to admit that there are any errors in the Scriptures, and took the ground that the whole Bible is inspired and equally inspired. "God's authority," he said, "is absolute. It does not admit of degrees." S. L. Bowman, in a contribution printed as late as 1889, drew the conclusion that the proper view of the Bible is intolerant of the supposition of errors even in matters historical, as well as in those of a moral and religious import.

A measure of significance, though not so very much, may be attributed to the fact that the book of Gaussen, written in advocacy of strict verbal inspiration, obtained a place in the conference course for the years 1876-80. Its use in this manner shows that at least some of the bishops at that time were favorable to its standpoint.

The list of writers thus far cited may serve to indicate that the high technical theory had not spent its energy in the Methodist body by the middle of the nineteenth century, and, indeed, that it was not without self-assertive vigor up to the last quarter of the century. It is to be observed, however, that the rival theory began to make inroads on its territory soon after the middle of the century. In a contribution to the *Methodist Review* in 1858, Daniel Curry intimated his conviction that some retrenchment from absolute inerrancy may very well be admitted. He said:

While we claim and contend earnestly for the inspiration of the Bible, we delight also to recognize the human form, and to commune with its utterances as with the voice of a friend. Nor do we any the less reverence its lessons because we suspect that it is not wholly raised above all human infirmities. . . . In many instances the infallible certainty of a revealed doctrine does not require the absolute correctness of the statement of facts with which it is enunciated.

³ *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, p. 436.

Twenty years later H. M. Harman gave expression to similar sentiments in his *Introduction to the Holy Scriptures*:

We are not required to make the absolute correctness of the evangelists in the most unimportant matters an article of faith, and to resort to far-fetched explanations to reconcile every apparent discrepancy.⁴

He recognized varied degrees of inspiration, and evidently thought that in exceptional instances there is indication of a very humble degree, saying, for example, of the Song of Solomon: "How far the song is inspired it is impossible to say."⁵

In the closing years of the century expressions of opinion on the side of the broader theory were far from being a novelty. We find them in quarters by no means distinguished for extravagant liberalism. Thus the *Methodist Review*, at a time when it was supposed to incarnate the very spirit of orthodoxy (July, 1890), remarked editorially, in quite unreserved terms, on the human errancy plainly visible in the biblical chronology and science. Again, a writer distinguished by an eminently sober and judicial temper, Nathaniel Burwash, president of Victoria College, took pains, in his *Manual of Christian Theology*, to disclaim the necessity of maintaining complete inerrancy for either Testament. He expressed, indeed, the conviction that the poetic license which appears in the ancient oracles was combined with a good degree of the historic spirit. But he added:

Beyond this general conviction of trustworthiness, we think it quite unnecessary to dogmatize in regard to the inerrancy of the Old Testament.

While awarding somewhat more stress to the historical details of the New Testament than to those of the Old, he still remarked:

But even this does not imply a miraculous verbal inerrancy, but such a truthful record, or faithful portrait, as an honest mind, quickened to its very best in memory by the deepest religious interest and sympathy, would furnish.⁶

With little, if any, exception, Methodist exegetes of any considerable experience and rank, who have written in recent years, have given evidence of their preference for the broader, as opposed to the high technical, theory of the Bible.

Concurring with the line of evidences just given, on the side of a growing acceptance of the broader theory of revelation, is the whole

⁴ P. 25.

⁵ First edition, p. 323.

⁶ Vol. I, p. 187.

body of indications of an enlarging appropriation of the modern critical views relative to the Pentateuch and some other portions of the Old Testament; for no Protestant would naturally be inclined to make room for these views who had not cordially accepted the broader theory. Now, it is undeniable that the critical views in question have been winning much territory in every prominent branch of Methodism. They have a standing in the principal theological schools. Thence they have been widely distributed through the pastorate. In large part they have found expression in volumes recently issued by the Methodist Book Concern.⁷ At the last Ecumenical Conference, held in London, they were referred to in a tone of tolerance, not to say of friendly recognition. And in this reference a conspicuous part was taken by the representatives of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Especially significant were the words of J. J. Tigert, editor of the *Review for Southern Methodism*:

The main problems, such as those of the Hexateuch and of Isaiah, appear to have been satisfactorily solved, and, amid considerable difference on details, there is essential agreement among the greater critics as to methods, grounds, and results. So far as I can see, there is no reason to anticipate such a reaction from and repudiation of the historical criticism of the Old Testament as befell the Tübingen criticism of the New; for that criticism was essentially an attempt to rewrite history on the basis of the Hegelian *a priori* philosophy. There is nothing common to these two schools and epochs of criticism, and it is unsafe to the last degree to argue from the fate which overtook one to a kindred one which must speedily befall the other.

Finally, it is legitimate to mention on this point the friendly welcome which has been accorded in Methodist ranks to Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*; for no reader can fail to see that this work, with all its just reputation for caution and moderation, accepts the cardinal conclusions of the later criticism of the Old Testament, and in its whole tenor is distinctly adverse to the high technical theory of the Scriptures.

The evidence seems, therefore, to enforce the conclusion that an effective movement toward a modified conception of the Bible is in progress within the domain of American Methodism. The theory

⁷ See among others, C. M. Cobern, *Commentary on Ezekiel and Daniel*; Milton Terry, *Moses and the Prophets*.

of strict inerrancy is being displaced by the broader theory. Doubtless the former is still entrenched in many minds. But when we consider the hold which the latter theory has upon the scholarship of the Protestant world in general, and the great advances which it has made in a score of years within Methodist ranks, it must in all sobriety be regarded as the theory which is favored with the promise of the future.

In connection with this part of our theme, it is worth while to notice briefly a relative transference of stress from the external to the internal evidences for revelation. In the early part of the nineteenth century Richard Watson wrote:

The principal and most appropriate evidence of a revelation from God must be external to the revelation itself. . . . Miracles must be considered the leading and absolute evidence of a revelation from God.⁸

In the latter part of the century W. B. Pope wrote:

The dignity of eternal truth demands that it should not lay the main stress of its demonstration on miracles; certainly never on miracles alone. . . . The grandest miracles which are the credentials of a revelation are in the substance of the revelation itself. Christ, the author of Christianity, and its substance and end, is the supreme miracle.⁹

Probably Watson's standpoint is still approximated in the thought of some Methodists, but it cannot be doubted that for the newer Methodist scholarship, Pope, rather than Watson, is the spokesman on this subject. There is a growing conviction that the great credential of the Bible lies in its contents; that is, in the spiritual wealth and potency of the truths which it assumes to teach; and that even the reported miracle is efficient as a proof only as it furnishes a congenial contribution to the biblical contents, only as it serves to disclose the character of God, and to make manifest a power directed by wisdom and love. More and more widely it is being apprehended that, in respect of evidential value, nothing can be placed on a parity with the unique personality of Christ and the Christ-filled contents of the New Testament. This point of view, it is needless to say, implies no hostility to the supposition of miracles. It is simply the dictate of a just discrimination as to the conditions under which

⁸ *Theological Institutes*, Vol. I, p. 71.

⁹ *Compendium of Theology*, Vol. I, pp. 65, 73.

reports of miracles are adapted to be conducive to a rational faith in revelation. Universally Methodist scholars are cordially tolerant of the supposition of the historical verity of miracles, though some of them are ready to admit that the historical attestation for certain miracles reported in the Bible is much less cogent than for others.

II. *Original sin*.—In its first stadium Methodism was undoubtedly committed to the conclusion that guilt, as well as corruption of nature, is inherited by the whole posterity of Adam. It was commonly held, indeed, that this guilt is unconditionally remitted in case of those dying in infancy, on the ground of the meritorious work of Christ, and never is a real source of damage to one who accepts the saving offices of the Redeemer. Still, it was postulated as something attaching, in the order of natural conditions, to every child of the race, and as needing a special remedy. A remnant of this way of thinking survives in the articles of religion of Episcopal Methodism. Happily, the article which treats directly of original sin escaped all infusion of this venerable fiction; but in the article on the Son of God it was given a place incidentally in the statement that Christ became a sacrifice, "not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men." As is perhaps indicated by this very subordinate reference to the element of guilt in the articles, Wesley laid the main stress upon the inherited corruption. Beyond doubt, however, he recognized the former element. In his treatise on original sin occurs the plain statement: "God does not look upon infants as innocent, but as involved in the guilt of Adam's sin."¹⁰ Richard Watson taught that Adam's transgression entailed upon his posterity a sentence not only of physical death, but also of spiritual and eternal death; and that, while this sentence is annulled for all who accept Christ, its repeal is conditional, so that it is quite possible that a penalty for Adam's sin should be included in the eternal punishment of any man who fails of salvation.¹¹ Wesley and Watson seem to have given very largely the standard on this subject for English Wesleyans. Later writers, such as James Rigg, W. B. Pope, and J. S. Banks, have repeated their teaching.

On the other hand, in the Methodist Episcopal Church the doctrine of hereditary guilt has long been in a moribund condition.

¹⁰ *Works*, Vol. XIV, p. 143.

¹¹ *Theological Institutes*, Vol. II, pp. 52-57.

Within the last half of the nineteenth century a few of her writers may have taken pains to pay it some respect, but they were powerless to rehabilitate it in the thought of the church. Miner Raymond distinctly repudiated it, and John Miley and R. S. Foster were also emphatic in its rejection. For well-nigh a generation it has had no considerable standing in the principal theological schools of this communion. We cannot believe that there is any sort of a chance for its resuscitation. Even the hold which it has through representation in the second article of religion will avail nothing; for the intelligent judgment of the church will concur with the following verdict of Miley:

This recognition of native guilt should have been eliminated from the second article in order to bring it into harmony with the seventh. The simplest explanation of its remaining is through mere oversight in the revision of the articles.¹²

Thus a distinct change in doctrinal conception has been wrought in the largest branch of Methodism—a change in the interest of self-consistency, since the notion of hereditary guilt is distinctly an alien factor in a system which makes a virtue of repudiating arbitrary sovereignty.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the revision of the conception of original sin seems to have proceeded more slowly than in the sister-communion. T. O. Summers, in accordance with his English antecedents, gave a place in his theological system to hereditary guilt.¹³ But it is evident that his exposition has not remained in full control. The idea of hereditary guilt is distinctly repudiated by W. F. Tillett, dean of the biblical department of Vanderbilt University and professor of systematic theology. He says:

While voluntary sin and acquired depravity both involve moral guilt, and are culpable and justly punishable, inherited depravity, considered in itself alone, does not involve guilt and culpability. No man is responsible for what comes to him by birth apart from any act of his own free will—at least not until he arrives at an age of intelligent moral accountability, and finds that grace has provided and put at his command the means whereby he can change his sinful nature, and bring it into conformity to the law of God.¹⁴

III. *The person and work of Christ.*—On these topics it is not possible to specify any very definite doctrinal transition. The

¹² *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, p. 525.

¹³ *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, pp. 34 ff.

¹⁴ *Personal Salvation*, p. 84.

movement here has issued rather in some measure of diversification of theory than in a wide acceptance of a revised dogmatic platform. The development relative to the person of Christ which probably has claimed the largest acceptance within Methodist bounds is the one which has been effected in the theological world at large in the last three quarters of a century; namely, a distinct enlargement of appreciation for the human perfection of the Son of man as a unique means of revealing at once God to man and man to himself.

With the more difficult problems of christological construction Methodist writers have not often attempted to grapple in earnest. Up to the seventh or eighth decade of the nineteenth century there was no considerable, if any, divergence from Richard Watson's quiet affirmation of the general terms of the Chalcedonian Creed. It was considered sufficient to maintain that in Christ two complete natures, the divine and the human, are united in one person. A serious wrestling with the data, rational and scriptural, which bear upon the exposition of this extraordinary personality was not undertaken. Thinking easily preserved an appearance of homogeneity because it followed the traditional channel and made no considerable effort to achieve insight or veritable explanation. In the later decades of the century more thought and research were expended, and the natural result has appeared in an initial diversification of scholarly conviction. Various thinkers have recognized, from a rational point of view, the great difficulty of predicating of Jesus a real childhood and a real youth, not to say a real manhood, on the supposition that there belonged to him, from the beginning of the incarnation, the perfectly unlimited vision of reality. Various students of the gospel narratives have recognized also the difficulty of reconciling certain scriptural facts and statements with the supposition that the habitual consciousness of the Christ of history was all-inclusive in its content.

In response to these difficulties, a number of Methodist scholars have concluded that there is no valid escape from admitting that the knowledge of Christ in the state of humiliation, however extraordinary it may have been, and however adequate to the fulfilment of a unique vocation, was not free from limitations. For an explanation of this fact of limitations a few have resorted to a radical doctrine of kenosis, the theory of a veritable depotentiation of the divine Logos in the

incarnation. Expression was given to this theory in the *Methodist Review* (March, 1897), in an article from the pen of J. M. Cramer, the particular form of kenotic doctrine which he advocated being that set forth by Ebrard; namely, the doctrine of the double life of the Logos, the original or normal and, supplementary to that, the depotentiated. More recently several Methodist scholars have expressed themselves in brief and general terms as favoring the kenotic theory;¹⁵ but the conditions under which they recorded their opinions leave it to be questioned whether they have any such independent interest in this theory that they would not be ready to surrender it, in case some other ground might be provided for explaining the apparent limitation of knowledge in the incarnate Christ. Possibly a solvent of difficulty may be found in the thought of a necessary mediation from the timeless sphere of the divine life to the forms of human conception and speech—a mediation taking place through the finite psychical nature of Christ, and being consequently subject to limitations. In any case, we surmise that the enormous metaphysical difficulties which pertain to the radical doctrine of the kenosis, and the scanty exegetical authority which it can claim, will restrict its progress among Methodist scholars. What has occurred in other theological domains serves to confirm this conviction.

Relative to the doctrine of Christ's work, or the nature of the atonement, the development has not been sufficiently pronounced to admit of being described in very precise terms. In the earlier part of the last century the established theory of Methodism was a moderate satisfaction theory—a theory which paid respect to the governmental bearing of Christ's work, but at the same time contended that in and through that work a tribute was rendered to the ethical nature of God, and not merely to the requirements of his governmental position. Within a portion of Methodist territory, especially in the Methodist Episcopal church, this theory has been compelled in part to give way to the pure governmental theory. The latter, as formulated by Miley, has been installed for a series of years in the conference course of study. Not a few people probably have come to think of it as *the* Methodist theory of the atonement. That is by no means the fact. In the majority both of treatises

¹⁵ Terry, *Moses and the Prophets*, Appendix.

and review articles by Methodist authors exception has been taken to the pure governmental theory. The general point of view of the older theory has survived in the minds of many theologians; and, so far as they have sought amendment, they have endeavored to get rid of obnoxious attachments—such as the assignment of a penal character to Christ's sufferings; such as the representation of an antithesis between the Father and the Son in respect to their attitude toward the sinning race; such also as the idea that atoning virtue was embraced in any mere physical transaction taken by itself, and not rather in the love, obedience, and self-devotement of a holy personality brought to manifestation in the visible transaction. With these developments another has had place. Instead of berating in severe terms the moral-influence theory, Methodist writers and preachers in not a few instances have come to recognize that this theory contains truth which ought never to be displaced or overshadowed by any rival theory. Comparatively few, doubtless, among Methodist pastors and teachers have announced their subscription to the moral-influence theory as an exclusive theory; but within a considerable range there has been of late a more appreciative estimate of it than was current a generation ago—an outcome quite in harmony with the widespread tendency in the theological world to render a larger emphasis to the paternal character of God as contrasted with the rectoral.

The circulation of Professor Denney's books on the atonement has emphasized in some degree the need of a closer consideration of the question whether the value of atonement is properly associated with the life of Christ as well as with his death. Only scanty tokens have yet been given of the tenor of Methodist thinking on this question. We judge that in this relation there is no complete consensus, some representatives of Methodism agreeing with Professor Denney's assignment of atoning value exclusively to the death of Christ, while others prefer to say, with the English Wesleyan, J. S. Lidgett: "The self-oblation which was consummated on the cross was begun at the incarnation."¹⁶ Those who hold the latter view claim that it is quite as catholic as the competing view, and that it has the advantage of superior congruity with the attribution of a distinctly ethical value

¹⁶ *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement*, p. 290.

to Christ's death, since the living Christ undoubtedly actualized the same ethical element, the same holy obedience and self-devotement, which found a culminating expression in his surrender to death upon the cross.

IV. *The conception of personal salvation.*—The most marked development which falls under this title concerns the interpretation of the advanced stage of salvation; in other words, the subject of Christian perfection or entire sanctification. On this subject John Wesley taught and bequeathed a fairly definite theory. It was manifestly his conviction that the work of grace which takes place in regeneration may be followed by a great consummating work worthy to be called entire sanctification; that entire sanctification, whatever intellectual and bodily defects it may fail to heal, not merely gives a normal direction to the will, but reaches back into the emotive nature, the sphere of impulses, desires, and affections, and profoundly renovates this background of the volitional life. Supposing the term "inbred sin" to cover all perverse tendencies of the emotive nature, we may say that Wesley taught that entire sanctification includes the elimination of inbred sin. From the scope which he assigned to this crowning experience, it logically follows that for its subject real grounds of temptation no longer remain in the heart or the spiritual nature, but are confined to intellectual limitations, to disordered states of the body, and to suggestions from without.

Doubtless, in one and another connection the definition of sin which Wesley set forth emphasized its voluntary nature. But this fact does not imply that he did not think of entire sanctification as extending into the background of what in strictness may be called volitional activity. For his psychology did not make the broad distinction between the emotive nature and the will which is current in our day; and, moreover, he might very well have thought of entire sanctification as reaching beyond sin proper to the standing occasions of sin in the tendencies or proclivities of the emotive nature. But, whatever explanation may be offered of the phraseology in question, it is quite certain that Wesley in his dominant way of thinking included in entire sanctification the elimination of inbred sin, as defined above.

This is indicated, in the first place, by the broad antithesis which he postulated between the regenerate state and the entirely sancti-

fied state. The proposition that in the regenerate believer there is no sin, no carnal mind, no bent to backsliding, he characterized as contrary both to the Word of God and the experience of Christians. In like manner, he rejected the proposition that if a man is holy at all, he is holy altogether. "That," he says, "does not follow: every babe in Christ is holy, and yet not altogether so. He is saved from sin; yet not entirely: it remains, though it does not reign." He noticed that the reborn man is apt to judge at first too highly of his condition, and to conclude that, because he feels no evil in his heart, none is left there; whereas universal experience shows that the full deliverance does not come at that point, and that the seed of sin is still remaining. On the other hand, he described entire sanctification as implying an entire renewal in the image of God, a total separation of sin from the soul, a total dying to sin, a condition in which the subject is freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers. He represented it as coming after profound conviction of inbred sin, and as being adequately attested only by the witness of the Holy Spirit, since one may feel all love and no sin for a time, while yet he is but partially sanctified. In short, it is manifest from the antithesis which Wesley made between regeneration and entire sanctification that he thought of the one as leaving behind a considerable deposit of inbred sin, and of the other as eliminating this deposit. Doubtless one can urge in rebuttal that Wesley once and again spoke of regeneration in very strong terms, as though it signified to his mind the complete renewal of the moral nature. But it is to be noticed that in a number of instances¹⁷ the connection shows that the emphatic terms were meant to be taken with a qualification. It is suggested, accordingly that a qualification is to be understood in the other instances, so that a decided balance remains on the side of the conclusion that Wesley's habitual thought affirmed a distinct antithesis between regeneration and entire sanctification, and gave to the latter term the broader and deeper sense naturally implied by this antithesis.

Again, Wesley's representation, that the complete cleansing—which the common thought of his Protestant contemporaries regarded as immediately antecedent to the entrance of the saved man into the

¹⁷ As in Sermons XIX, XL, and XLV.

other world—may be realized at varying intervals this side of death, argues that he made entire sanctification, as the phrase was ordinarily used by him, to cover all underlying tendencies in the soul which contend against the perfect dominion of love and righteousness.

Once more, repeated expressions in the hymns of his brother Charles, who at the time of writing in all likelihood shared his essential standpoint, are indicative of John Wesley's conviction that the extirpation of inbred sin falls within the scope of entire sanctification, viewed as an attainable experience in this life. Lines like the following are sufficiently unequivocal in their import:

Let me thy witness live,
When sin is all destroyed.

Speak the second time, Be clean!
Take away my inbred sin.

Fill me with thy glorious power,
Rooting out the seeds of sin.

Break the yoke of inbred sin,
And fully set my spirit free.

The seed of sin's disease
Spirit of health remove.

In face of all this, it avails little to point out that in two or three instances Wesley expressed a willingness to waive the question whether sin is only suspended in the subject of Christian perfection, so as to be practically inoperative, or is thoroughly destroyed. This was an irenic stroke prompted by his desire for the greatest possible degree of union with earnest-minded contemporaries who may have been disinclined to accept the more radical position. His characteristic standpoint was indubitably on the side of the conclusion that Christian perfection, or entire sanctification, as an attainable experience in this life, works the elimination of inbred sin as a fund of abnormality in the emotive nature.¹⁸

The original Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification, as defined above, has never ceased to have its advocates in American Methodism. For several generations it was the prevailing theory among

¹⁸ See Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, and Sermons XIII, XL, LXXXI; also Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, Vol. I, pp. 444, 462, 498, 533; Vol. II, pp. 307, 346, 418-24, 431, 451-53, 465, 596; Vol. III, pp. 22, 175, 462, 625.

those who took pains to formulate and to propagate a doctrine of the higher Christian life. It appears in the books of the best-accredited writers on this theme for a large part of the nineteenth century. It was represented, if not always with entire lucidity, yet in sufficiently unmistakable terms, by George Peck, Nathan Bangs, R. S. Foster, Miner Raymond, Jesse T. Peck, Daniel Steele, and others. There is good warrant for saying that the dominant Methodist doctrine down to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, so far as that teaching came to literary expression, made entire sanctification a great consummating experience, posterior to regeneration, and including in its scope the elimination of inbred sin. This is not saying that the doctrine of entire sanctification in the given form was made, up to that point, a vital issue throughout the whole area of American Methodism. So far as active, interested propagation was concerned, it was for very much of the period rather the speciality of a school in the church than the property of the church as a whole.¹⁹

In the latter part of the century a growing tendency to dissent from the original and the transmitted Wesleyan theory came to manifestation. One evidence of this tendency is contained in published writings. In a number of treatises the traditional doctrine was distinctly challenged. Among these were writings of the English theologian, J. A. Beet, which were circulated in this country through denominational instrumentalities. His theory amounts to a substitute for that of Wesley. In place of assuming an elimination of perverse inward tendencies, he postulates, as the summit of possible Christian attainment in the present life, such a maturity of will-power, and strength of righteous purpose as are competent to secure victory over every evil impulse as it rises into consciousness. The inward tendency to sin, he maintains, is not annihilated, but it may continuously be frustrated and made relatively less and less formidable.²⁰ Substantially the same theory of a progressive sanctification, to which no definite limit can be set, is advocated by

¹⁹ The facts of history seem to lend considerable countenance to Professor George A. Coe's contention, based on psychological grounds as well as on observation, that the practical appropriation and professed exemplification of such a tenet as the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection cannot pass beyond the bounds of a coterie or limited school in any large communion (*The Spiritual Life*, pp. 63, 64).

²⁰ *Holiness as understood by the Writers of the Bible; The New Life in Christ.*

James Mudge in a book entitled *Growth in Holiness toward Perfection*. Wayward impulses he teaches, taken in bulk, can at best be conquered, not eradicated. A remnant of depravity—that is, of tendencies falling below the level of the ideal—may be expected to abide till the end of earthly life. Cleansing from all sin is possible to the wayfarer only in the sense of deliverance from its guilt and power and practice, not in the sense of the complete extirpation of its subconscious grounds.

A view identical with the foregoing, in its stress upon attainable sanctification as belonging to the sphere of the conscious life, but differing somewhat in the tenor of its reference to inherent depravity, is contained in the volume of D. W. C. Huntington on *Sin and Holiness*. His contention is that entire sanctification is coincident with regeneration, and that among the subjects of the new birth the proper ground of distinction concerns the differing degrees of steadiness with which the regenerate character may be maintained and acted out. By character in his exposition is understood the dominant choice or attitude of the will; anything outside the sphere of conscious volitional activity falls outside the domain of character proper, and pertains to the sphere of conditions under which character is actualized.

Within the southern branch of Methodism a book advocating essentially the same view has been written by J. M. Boland. Other representatives of that branch have freely expressed their dissent from the traditional Wesleyan platform. Especially noteworthy is the position taken by Dean W. F. Tillet, of Vanderbilt University. In the volume already cited he criticises Wesley for assuming a distinct antithesis between the experience of regeneration and a second experience called entire sanctification. The converted man, he contends, must at the point of conversion or regeneration reckon himself to be entirely done with sin. He is not to look, or to be directed to look, to a second transformation, but simply to go on in absolute fidelity to the new character and relation attained by him. If at any subsequent point he finds evidence of sin in himself—faults of temper, pride, self-will, and the like—then he is to apply at once in all earnestness to the remedy; that is, to the power of God laid hold of by faith and consecration. If at a subsequent point

still there is a similar experience of a falling short of the standard, the same process is to be repeated. Thus, in place of a *second* blessing after conversion, which blessing is supposed to consummate entire sanctification, we have from the point of conversion a continuous striving after a thoroughly sanctified life, with such crises included in the religious career of the individual as conditions and exigencies special to him may entail.²¹

Obviously, on the ground of any one of these writers there is no place for the old-time conception of entire sanctification, as a distinct second blessing, evidenced by the testimony of the divine Spirit, and to be reckoned a matter of appropriate and even obligatory profession. There is room only for the notion of an indeterminate number of more or less notable reinforcements of the grace received in regeneration—reinforcements qualifying for a more or less constant victory over all evil incitements both from without and from within. The most that a Christian could say from the standpoint of the revised theories would be that, to the best of his knowledge, for such and such a time he had enjoyed so complete a victory over evil as to incur no occasion of condemnation.

Writings like those under consideration, composed by men of eminent standing in the church, circulated for the most part through official ecclesiastical channels, and meeting with tokens of extensive appreciation, constitute an evidence of no little weight. Manifestly they must be taken as symptomatic of a very considerable tendency to revise quite materially the traditional doctrine of entire sanctification.

Another evidence of defection from the older standpoint may be noticed in the implicit attitude toward it characteristic of a large section of the ministry. No one who has had large acquaintance with Methodist pastors will deny that a very decided majority of them, at least of those who have had considerable experience in church work, are disinclined to preach entire sanctification after the pattern of Wesley and his successors. They feel that it is well-nigh a matter of despair to secure satisfactory witnesses of the supreme grace. Occasionally a beautiful example of holy living among the professors of entire sanctification recalls to their minds the radiant

²¹ Pp. 510-34.

saintliness of a Fletcher; but the comforting spectacle is all too rare. They notice that a published claim to finished purity easily becomes a temptation to broaden, at the expense of a severe self-scrutiny, the distinction between mere natural infirmities and sins. They discover that very high professions on the part of those who have not gained an extraordinary self-knowledge through a profound, varied, and prolonged discipline, are not likely to forward the cause of religious zeal in the congregation at large, but tend rather to embarrass the zealous worker in the great task of making earnest religion appear sane, reasonable, wholesome, and attainable. In plain words, however little they may say upon the subject, they have evidently come to entertain a chilling suspicion, not to say a downright conviction, that the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection is not in its proper terms a workable doctrine.

It would be taking a step beyond the evidence to say that this doctrine has lost its hold upon American Methodism. Statements in high official quarters, up to a very recent date, have been very largely in its favor.²² Positive and open exception to it has been confined thus far to a minority of Methodist scholars. But evidently when nine out of ten Methodist pastors esteem it a benign providence which relieves them of the occasion to deal with a group of sanctificationists of the ordinary type in their respective flocks, the prospect for the traditional doctrine is far from being bright. This fact, however, should not be taken as implying that a certain residuum will not be carried over from the doctrine and ever find among Methodists a warm appreciation. Wesley's teaching on this theme will remain as a protest against supineness in religion, as a rebuke to contentment with spiritual defeat, as a potent admonition to the follower of Christ to press forward to the complete enthronement of love and righteousness in the heart and the life. The Wesleyan theory may be modified; the practical demand which the theory enshrines will not be neglected except by a Methodism recreant to its history.

A few topics additional to that of entire sanctification might properly receive some consideration within the present division of our theme. Something might be said, for example, about a relative

²² Instances are given by J. R. Brooks, *Scriptural Sanctification*, pp. 155-67.

abatement of stress upon conversion as a distinct crisis in conscious experience. While it is a somewhat apocryphal notion that Methodism, as such, ever insisted that a valid religious experience must be in that form, it is true that the older type of Methodism placed large stress upon conversion expedients, as compared with the instrumentalities of early religious training. True to its record as an evangelistic power, American Methodism still holds that revival fire is a perfectly legitimate means for burning through the indifference characteristic of great multitudes, and that very many are likely to enter the kingdom of grace only through a powerful arrest and a distinct crisis in experience. At the same time, the feeling has been gaining ground that the church in the proper discharge of its vocation must, to a very large extent, safeguard the child from the start against the life of practical unbelief and alienation from the heavenly Father. Thus the gentler means of Christian nurture are receiving enlarged appreciation, and are made to share the field of interested attention with those strenuous forms of Christian effort which seek to rescue men through instant decisions and radical transformations.

It might be noticed also that on the theme of the witness to salvation, though a distinct change of standpoint on the part of the general body of Methodists cannot be asserted, the door has, nevertheless, been set ajar for the incoming of a modified view. Evidence has been given in some quarters of a disposition to make less account, than was at one time customary, of a distinct, extraordinary message to the individual, and to emphasize the standing ground of assurance which resides in a filial character and consciousness. A recent treatise by a Methodist author, waiving the question as to what may occur at some special crisis, and considering assurance as a continuous fact in a vital Christian life, sets forth this statement of its method:

Assurance is in and through the filial consciousness, which consciousness is at once an activity of man's spirit and a product of the Holy Spirit's agency.

V. *Eschatology*.—American Methodism has not made the theme of the last things a matter for very specific or extended discussion. There is, indeed, some ground for the suspicion that it has not taken pains in relation to this field to reach in all respects a clear consciousness as to the logical outcome of its own postulates. For instance, on the question of the possibility of moral transitions in the life to come,

it has been customary for Methodist theologians, so far as the rational argument is concerned, to stop short with the complacent affirmation that it is not necessary to provide any room for such transitions, since Methodist teaching authorizes the assumption of a fair chance of salvation for all men in this life. The fact has been well-nigh overlooked that a question may legitimately be raised as to whether a system which rejects irresistible grace and arbitrary reprobation, which strongly accentuates divine benevolence and human freedom, has logical means for excluding, all at once, at the end of earthly life, an element of contingency in the moral status of souls imperfectly developed in good or evil. Again, there has been an inadequate attempt to explain how an assertion of the inherent or essential immortality of the soul can be reconciled with the doctrine of the constant dependence of every finite entity upon the divine efficiency—a doctrine which Methodist theologians have held in common with those of every other name. The latter doctrine certainly would seem to imply that there is nothing in the nature of the soul itself which serves as an immediate guarantee of immortality, but rather that endless persistence in being must be dependent upon the divine purpose.

As respects positive developments, it can be said that Methodist scholars, with little, if any, exception, have come to repudiate the notion of literal hell fire as a piece of crude realism. It can also be stated that it is now a very common thing for Methodist writers to reject the thought of a necessary material identity of the resurrection body with the body of the present life. Twenty-five years ago indulgence in such teaching would have been liable to elicit protests; in the present it is quite certain not to evoke serious complaint from anyone above the rank of a fussy obscurantist. Other points of departure from the traditional eschatology might be mentioned, but most of them have received thus far too limited a suffrage to be accounted symptomatic of a general drift.

The conclusion seems to be warranted that, on the whole, American Methodism has preserved a fair balance between conservative and progressive tendencies. It has not been characterized by any spurts or rash adventures in the dogmatic domain. Innovating opinions have been compelled to give an account of themselves, and to prove

their ability to meet the tests of scholarship and piety. On the other hand, the door has not been closed against dogmatic amelioration. The advocate of improved points of view has met with a good degree of tolerance. Here and there, it is true, an intemperate dogmatist has raised an alarm-cry and called for the unsheathing of the sword of ecclesiastical discipline. But the responsible authorities have generally been cautious about giving heed to the intolerant demand. The genius of Methodism makes dogma subordinate to life, not indeed disparaging dogma, since in the long run it is likely to have a serious effect upon life, but yet holding it distinctly subordinate to the promotion of love and righteousness in the individual and the brotherhood. Unsparing rigor and excessive anxiety in upholding subordinate points in doctrine would accord neither with the spirit of the founder nor with the conception of the mission of Methodism as a great evangelistic agency devoted to the spread of scriptural holiness. That American Methodism has been to so great an extent true to its ideal, and has blended with its conservatism so much of tolerance and catholicity, must be gratifying to every lover of free scholarship.